

# Programme Director's Annual Report 1999

## 1 Introduction and contribution to ESRC themes

The Directorship was taken up on 1 March 1999. This report covers the 10 month period to December 31<sup>st</sup> 1999. This has been primarily a period of initial development.

### 1.1 Contribution of the Programme to the ESRC's thematic priorities

The Programme will make a significant contribution to the thematic priority referring to **Knowledge, Communication and Learning**. The Programme's research themes focus on the acquisition of knowledge and skilled performance.

The research work will seek to promote understanding of effective contexts for teaching and learning and, of necessity, will explore the challenges and opportunities afforded by new technologies. It will promote life long learning at the level of pedagogy.

The Programme also has relevance to other ESRC themes such as People and Technology, Innovation, Social Inclusion and Exclusion and to Economic Performance and Development.

## 2 Overview of the year

### 2.1 Commissioning of Phase I

Phase I specification was completed before the period of this report.

In February 1999 the specification for Phase I bids against £2m was advertised. There was an open call inviting bids for funding to establish or enhance research networks (to comprise multi-disciplinary research teams, including users, across at least 3 higher education institutions). Bids for Career Development awards were also invited from individuals well placed for timely career enhancement through the conduct of major research activity in the field. The call attracted 94 Research Network proposals and 67 Career Development Associate applications. These were considered by the Steering Committee in May; subsequently, 8 networks and 4 career development bids were shortlisted. The Director's Office was heavily involved in discussions with short listed teams, advising on research and communication plans. In October, **4 Phase I Networks and 2 Career Development Associates** were agreed for funding - see details at <http://www.ex.ac.uk/ESRC-TLRP/phase1.htm>

2.2 **Phase II development** - the Programme **Communication Plan** was agreed in October. An initial **website** was commissioned and installed in June 1999. This was enhanced and updated in October and December.

2.3 Through the summer, a UK wide **consultation exercise** was conducted to help shape the main, Phase II research agenda and Programme specification. This exercise comprised 6 regional seminars, a website questionnaire, a postal questionnaire, 12 focus group meetings for users and extensive telephone and face to face interviewing of researchers, users and policy makers. A review of reviews was conducted to establish strengths and weaknesses of research in the field.

- Each of the 6 regional seminars was attended by an invited set (N = 20) of researchers, users and beneficiaries and lasted 24 hours affording opportunity for extended discussion of the research challenges involved in meeting the Programme objectives. Each was recorded and the 6 recorded discussions were subjected to a content analysis to identify core themes.

- The postal questionnaire was sent out to 1100 persons and institutions and followed up by a reminder. The return of 80 constituted a disappointing response rate. Only a dozen responses came via the web version of the same instrument.
- The 12 Focus Groups comprised sets of difficult to reach users. The Groups involved were distance learning students, school and FE students, overseas students in FE and HE, CPD students, undergraduates in FE/HE, nursery and primary school teachers, secondary school teachers, tutors in FE and HE, private sector training providers, parents of school pupils and human resource managers. The discussions were recorded and subsequently subjected to content analysis.
- Individual reports from each seminar and composite reports for (a) the questionnaire responses and interviews and (b) the Focus Groups were prepared and sent to the Steering Committee. There was a remarkable consistency of priority research issues across the various modes of consultation.
- Three core research themes were fed into the specification from the consultation exercise. The themes were:
  - i how can motivation and learner engagement in learning processes be increased?
  - ii how can advances in research on professional practice, human cognition, classroom processes and telematics be transformed to promote learner achievement?
  - iii how can learning organisations be created and transformed into learning communities with a capacity for continuous improvement?

A strategic approach involving research on teaching and learning in authentic settings was strongly commended.

- 2.4 The Programme Office Manager was appointed for July and the Assistant Director appointed for September.
- 2.5 The draft **Phase II Programme Specification** was considered by the Steering Committee and finalised and adopted in October. A call for proposals was published. 4 regional seminars were conducted to brief and advise potential bidders. Seminars were held in Edinburgh, Leeds, London and Cardiff. More than 100 academics attended. The Director and Assistant Director operated a consultancy and advisory service throughout the bid preparation period providing written, telephone and face-to-face support and advice to a substantial number of research teams.
- The call for proposals attracted 94 applications by the deadline of 21 January 2000. The average size of the bids was £650,000 and the total sum bid over £61 m against an available sum of £8.0 m.
- 2.6 **The overall Programme and the Phase I** Networks and Career Development Associates were **launched** at a well-received event in November, attended by over 60 key stakeholders from all sectors of education and learning. The Minister for Lifelong Learning, Mr Malcolm Wicks, made the keynote launch address, and each Network gave a short presentation on its aims. The Programme Director outlined the overall purpose of the Programme and the Phase II prospectus.
- 2.7 In pursuit of the objective of **enhancing research capacity** in teaching and learning a report on this issue was commissioned from the University of Cambridge. The implications of this report were considered by the Steering Committee in October. The discussion fed in to the Phase II specification and further work on enhancing research capacity is proceeding.

### 3 Programme Activities

#### 3.1 **External communication**

3.1.1 The Programme's Communication Plan published in 1999 envisages a wide range of external communication activities with the whole range of stakeholder groups identified as part of its Communication Audit. Ten principal stakeholder groups were identified: Parliamentary; national and local government; education bodies; the research community; teachers and lecturers; unions, professional bodies and campaigning groups; industry, commerce and their training organisations; the media; users of research findings; and the general public.

3.1.2 As the Programme is in its early stages external communication activities in 1999 were mostly at the planning stage. The only major external event which took place in the year was the Programme Launch held in November. Detailed planning of conferences and seminars in 1999 was limited to the next two years (2000 and 2001), since it was judged unrealistic to predict the optimum pattern for these in advance of the announcement of the projects to be funded under Phase II (expected in July 2000).

3.1.3 The Director's Office generated the following **reports to the Steering Committee**:

- i Report on each of the 6 consultation seminars
- ii Focus Group report
- iii Questionnaire Analysis report
- iv Review of Reviews of research on teaching and learning
- v Phase II Specification
- vi Communication Plan

Item iv, v and vi are published elsewhere on the Programme website.

3.1.4 **International networks.** A meeting was held (jointly with ESRC) with Dr. E. Hamilton of the National Science Foundation (USA) to discuss potential links between the Programme and NSF's Research on Learning and Education programme. There has been correspondence with the Nordic Research Councils and the OECD and agreement in principle to collaborate. Outputs will include exchange of academics, international benchmarking, extension of the range of experience of senior managers and investigators and the development of international research capacity in the field.

3.1.5 **Presentations** related to Programme activities were made to the All Souls Group (Oxford); the British Psychological Society (Education section); the British Psychological Society (Development section); UCET; SCETT (details are in the Annex).

3.1.6 **Media and Press coverage** of the Programme was limited to the specialist educational journals, although the News Release on the launch was sent to all the major media outlets. The Welsh Assembly and Scottish Executive also issued supporting releases. Specific press coverage was as follows:

- Times Education Supplement, 12 February - interview with Programme Director
- Times Higher Education Supplement, 11 June - article on Phase I bidding process
- Express and Echo (Exeter), 29 July - article on Programme office and research goals
- Times Higher Education Supplement, 19 November - report on Programme launch
- Times Education Supplement, 3 December - full page article on Programme
- Times Higher Education Supplement, 10 December - report on Phase II bidding

#### 3.2 **Links with Research Users**

- 3.2.1 In 1999 activity in respect of developing links with research users was mainly at the consultation and planning stage, since no research or dissemination activity had yet taken place.
- 3.2.2 A wide range of preliminary meetings were held in late 1999 and continuing into 2000 with potential private and public sector users of research as part of the Communication Audit, in all the stakeholder categories identified in the Communication Plan especially teachers, trainers, lecturers, policy makers and educational bodies. The meetings were designed to gather information about potential users and beneficiaries, existing networks of communication and influence, and how the Programme can most effectively communicate with all its stakeholder groups.
- 3.2.3 Design work was undertaken in 1999 on developing a database of research users in all categories; this is expected to be completed in early 2000.
- 3.2.4 The Programme's website invited comments from potential users and some 20 individuals submitted comments and/or requested inclusion in the Programme's database of users.

#### 4 **Future Programme Developments**

In the next year (2000), planned activities will attend to:

- i commissioning the Phase II projects
- ii developing the Programme's identity and public profile
- iii providing for training to enhance research capacity
- iv identifying and progressing theoretical and methodological debates in the field
- v enhancing national and international networks and appropriate strategic partnerships

The principal Programme Events envisaged are as follows:

- i Short listing for Phase II research projects will take place in March. Commissioning decisions will be made in July for project starts as soon as practicable thereafter. It is anticipated that 10 - 15 major projects will be funded. It is anticipated that shared reviewing will take place with a relevant NSF Programme.
- ii A seminar is to be held in February to discuss options for a Virtual College for research training. As it is anticipated that this will be established in February 2001 following a tendering and commissioning process.
- iii Throughout the year the Programme Website will be developed further, while recognising the relatively limited access to best-technology computing facilities of many of the key stakeholders, especially teachers. Interactive pages for specific stakeholder groups, including the media, are planned.
- iv The first Programme meeting of Phase I researchers will be held in June. This will be an invitation-only event to share perspectives within the Programme on theory and methods of research, research capacity building, user engagement and Programme communication.
- v A Programme Bulletin is planned for a very wide distribution in September 2000. This will be designed to inform all stakeholder groups of the projects funded under the Programme and invite user engagement with its communication activities. Future bulletins will thereafter be designed and targeted at specific stakeholder groups using a sophisticated database of individual and institutional interests.
- vi The second Programme Launch, to announce Phase II funding decisions, is planned for October (after the start of the academic year and the end of the Parliamentary recess).

- vii The first Annual Conference of the Programme is planned for November 2000; this will involve about 50 delegates funded by the Programme and will also be open to external attendees funded through payment of conference fees by individuals / their institutions. There is a possibility that this Conference will be a joint or at least shared venture with the NSF.

## **ANNEX**

### **Report on the Director's and Assistant Director's activities**

#### a) Publications

- i 'Research agendas towards Increasing Student Achievement'. In FEDA College Research Journal - Autumn '99, pp. 7 - 9.
- ii In preparation, 'Classroom Learning' to be published by the BPS as the Vernon-Wall lecture.

#### b) Conferences/Workshops Attended

- b.1 Presentation to the All Souls Group on 'Evidence Based Practice' (July).
- b.2 Attendance at BERA Annual Conference (September) to consult regarding Phase II specification.
- b.3 Presentation to Annual Conference of the developmental section of the British Psychological Society (September).
- b.4 Talk on 'Learning' to the Annual Conference of UCET (November).
- b.5 Paper on 'Evidence based practice' presented to Annual Conference of SCETT (November).
- b.6 Presented Vernon Wall lecture to the Education Section of the British Psychological Society (November) 'Classroom Learning'.
- b.7 Keynote speeches to the following head teacher conferences:  
  
Berkshire Primary Headteachers' Conference, Bracknell - 24 September 1999  
Lewisham Headteachers' Conference - 3 November 1999

#### c) Project Issues

- c.1 Providing Intellectual Leadership (See d.1; d.4; d.6; d.7; d.10; d.12 below)
- c.2 Engaging Potential Users (See d.2; d.3; d.4; d.7; d.9; d.13; d.14 below)
- c.3 Inputs to Public Policy debates (See d.11 below)
- c.4 Providing Inputs to ESRC Policy Debates
  - i attended ESRC Training Board to discuss research capacity

#### d) Report on Director's Activities

- d.1 Advised the Steering Committee on Phase I shortlisting. Liaised with all short listed project leaders and career development candidates to sharpen bids and meet Steering Committee concerns.
- d.2 Established and developed Programme's Website.
- d.3 Wrote the first Programme Communication Plan.
- d.4 Planned, managed and led all aspects of the consultation exercise through to preparing and presenting reports to the Steering Committee.
- d.5 Appointed Office Manager, Assistant Director and the Assistant Secretary.
- d.6 Conducted and wrote the Review of Reviews.
- d.7 Wrote the specification for Phase II.
- d.8 Established contact with National Science Foundation and the Nordic Research Councils.
- d.9 Arranged and led Programme Launch.
- d.10 Led regional briefing seminars for Phase II.
- d.11 Appointed to the National Educational Research Forum and attended subsequent meetings.
- d.12 Engaged in continuous advisory and consultancy activity through the Phase II bid preparation period.
- d.13 Engaged in preliminary discussions with educational publishers with a view to a Programme Series of monographs, collected papers and journal articles.
- d.14 Undertook a Communications Audit of key stakeholders and channels of communication.